Postcolonial Lack and Aesthetic Promise in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*

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Article:

In his documentary *film The Riddle of Midnight,* Salman Rushdie returns to India 40 years after independence to see if a definable national identity exists. He interviews Indians of different backgrounds and economic statuses, and a crowd confronts him and asks "How can a country that never previously existed become independent? What does it mean to call this crowd of separate national histories, conflicting cultures, and warring faiths, a nation?" Rushdie, is narrator and national spokesman, answers unsatisfactorily, "It's by the lack of definition that you know it's you."

The fiftieth anniversary of independence occasioned another round of national introspection. "[W]e are a land of belonging rather than of blood," writes Shashi Tharoor (126). Sunil Khilnani, addressing the same "tantalizing possibility of a principle of unity but its evident empirical lack" (157), attempts to move beyond competing claims for a singular national identity without abandoning the nation altogether. In place of the old opposition between "the monochromy of the past-imperial imagination," "nationalist histories of a unified people," and "the pointillism of the new Indian historians" searching for "examples 'resistance' (textual and practical) to the ideas of the nation and the state," he proposes "new routes, that do not altogether abandon the terrain of political history, but recount it in different terms" (3).

Khilnani's route begins with the vastly different but ultimately collaboratory visions of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi for an independent India and proceeds through key cities—Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore—just as Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* charts a similar journey through the workings of a national imagination. Tracing the story of India's colonial and postcolonial histories from the Moorish invaders to the sectarian, technological present, the Moor presents his family saga against a national backdrop. Beginning with greed and corruption and ending with rampant commercialism and communal violence, the story is essentially pessimistic. Yet Rushdie tempers this pessimism with the regenerative potential of the aesthetic. When existing political and social metaphors fail to hold the subject's allegiance, Rushdie suggests, we must turn to the aesthetic to provide a new perspective, to heal historical wounds *enough* to make renewed faith in the nation possible. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* historical., metaphorical, and narrative concerns reflect one another. To represent and respond to the paradox of national identity through history and across cultural differences, Rushdie employs sutures and palimpsests, combining them into an aesthetic vision that, although never wholly successful, attempts to allay what Saleem in *Midnight's Children* calls the "national longing for form."

Rushdie may have borrowed the trope oldie palimpsest from Nehru, who pictured Indian history as a palimpsest of successful intercultural exchanges that the new nation would constitutionally extend and guarantee. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* that image is compounded, as it is in Nehru's own writings, by the metaphor of the nation as family, a metaphor whose longevity stems From its ability to synthesize both historical and seemingly ahistorical aspects of the nation. Playing off the rich associative traditions of the Western patriarchal Family and Mother India, Rushdie shows their competing attempts to forge unity out of historical, ethnic, religious, caste, and linguistic difference. By invoking the metaphor of the nation as family, he exposes its ideological foundations even as he uses it to sustain an imaginary identification between the nation, its subjects, and

readers. We Find in the narrator, the Moor, a representative of India's complicated colonial history, encompassing not just British colonization but earlier invaders as well as recent corporate neocolonial powers. Countering this patriarchal genealogy of conquest and modernization, which is rendered suspect and Fallible in the novel, is a vision of Indian unity represented by competing images of Mother India. On one level, the paternal family as national allegory works through a series of metaphoric substitutions leading from a traditional division of gender roles to a definition of the "modern" nation based on Western models of cultural, political. and economic progress. On another level. the images of Mother India—ranging from the Moor's rebellious, artistic mother, Aurora, to Hindu goddesses to Indira Gandhi to icons of popular culture—offer religious, political, and aesthetic figures of unification across historical periods. 14..uslidie works from both traditions, striving to fuse national identity out of multiple images while exposing the cracks and stippages between them. While the novel assiduously critiques the effects and efficacy of the nation-as-family metaphor, it, along with its narrator and, I suspect, most readers including myself, remain tied to its foundational terms.

In focusing on how the image of the family captures the soul of the modern nation, Rushdie illuminates the metaphor's circulation through discourses of national identity, asking us to rethink our easy acceptance of its terms. As the predominant metaphor for modern India, it relies on the naturalization of gender roles to accommodate India's mythic and religious traditions and its modernity. By ascribing to women representation of the nation's "atavistic and authentic body […] tradition" and to men its "progressive, or revolutionary, principle of discontinuity," writes Anne McClintock ()2), the family metaphor helps explain the nation's conflicted yet continuous identity through time.[1] The metaphor only works to the extent that it can provide a common image for collective identification through a conflation of gender roles, cultural motifs, and national history. R. Radhakrishnan argues for a theoretical approach to gender and nationalism that does not subsume one to the other. He begins with Partha Chatterjee's model of nationalism and its opposition between Westernized nations and nativist ones. The split—echoing in terms of public versus private. modernity versus timelessness, and male versus female—reduces gender to essentialized identities on the nation's linear path from feminine victim or goddess to masculine nation-state. Chatterjee traces this development through anticolonial to postcolonial Indian nationalism. In order to protect a sense of their own identity in the lace of colonial power, he argues, indigenous colonized communities separate the material from the spiritual:

> The material is the domain of the "outside," of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. […] The spiritual, on the other hand, is an "inner" domain bearing the essential" marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the !material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. (6)

This model appears to create a double bind for postcolonial national identity, Internal identity, no matter how complex or fraught with difference, becomes essential and mythic, while economic, political, and social identities are evaluated according to standards of modern liberal and capitalist ideology, As Radhakrishnan writes, "Woman becomes the allegorical name for a specific historical failure: the failure to coordinate the political or the ontological with the epistemological within an undivided agency" (85). This failure is both essentially gendered and unavoidable, as the model itself seemingly forecloses the possibility of alternative national identities. The internal or "native" identity can only be ahistorical, apolitical, and static. Reading national identity in these gendered terms means that if the nation is, as Benedict Anderson argues, an imagined community, then as Chatterjee notes, "[e]ven our imaginations remain forever colonized" (5).

Gandhi was himself adept at fusing conflicting symbols of the nation into those of an "authentic" Indian identity to legitimate and bolster the cause of nationalism. Although he launched his political movement from the city of Ahmedabad and was educated abroad, as was Nehru, he crafted his political identity as oppositional to Western modernization. This strategy does not detract from the sincerity of Gandhi's commitment to political self-determination through rural life; rather, it exemplifies the way in which the gendered model of the nation—here figured as rural life and pacifism versus urban colonial violence—may create a foundation for political resistance.

Radhakrishnan and Chatterjee call for the recognition of communal identities outside of the spectrum defined by the Enlightenment subject and "his" nation, identities that may form the basis for alternative constructions of national identity. Chatterjee's historiographic project focuses on examples of specifically "Indian" modernity to unravel "an inelegant braiding of an idea of community with the concept of capital" (237).To pursue this focus, he looks at formations of nationalism within the spiritual domain during the colonial era. Thus, in a reformulation of the traditional gender roles used to substantiate national identity, the inner or spiritual realm becomes the foundation for alternative modernities, and community replaces family as the central image of identification. Despite this approach, Chatterjee ends on a note of disappointment:

> The irony is, of course. that this other narrative is again violently interrupted once the postcolonial nation state attempts to resume its journey along the trajectory of world-historical development. The modern state, embedded as it is within the universal narrative of capital, cannot recognize within its jurisdiction any Corm of community except the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation. (238)

Rushdie is similarly pessimistic about the relationship between community and postcolonial national identity though for different reasons. In *The Moor's Last* Sigh. community is not beneficent, but violently and authoritatively exclusionary. The strongest community in the novel is that of the Hindu nationalists, led by Kaman "Mainduck" Fielding, a caricature of the leader Bal Thackeray, and Rushdie holds them responsible for the transformation of his beloved cosmopolitan Bombay into sectarian Mumbai. Rushdie therefore turns back to the image of the nation as family, both paternal and maternal, to try to resurrect an inclusive image or Indian plurality.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given its prominence in political and literary texts, the family metaphor has become a central trope in postcolonial criticism as well. Postcolonial studies are beset by the question of aesthetic and material context: how to account for a text's relationship to colonial experience without subsuming its other attributes to a comparison with the West. This question Frequently emerges in terms that Fredric Jameson sets forth when he characterizes literature either as libidinal and private or as national allegory. He maintains that

> [T]hird World texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the prime individual &tiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation if the public third-world culture arid society.*
> (69, original emphasis).

This model h been exhaustively critiqued for its homogenization of colonial experiences and its replication of colonialism's center/periphery organization. As Revathi Krishnaswamy cautions, Jameson's

> paradigm of postcolonial literature as national allegory uniformly constitutes all "Third World" intellectuals, regardless of their gender or class, as marginalized insurgents or as nationalists struggling against a monolithic Western imperialism. Difference is reduced to equivalence, interchangeability, syncretism, and diversity, white a leveling subversive subalternity is indiscriminately attributed to any and all. (129)

The most prevalent alternatives to Jameson 's reading of postcolonial literature are those substituting class, gender. or racial identifications for national ones and those focusing on the local material-historical concerns of the text. How, then, do we approach novels. such as The *Moor's Last Sigh*, that embody national allegory as an organizing motif? Rushdie invokes that allegory to question its underlying structures. His use of the family trope connects the text, ii narrator, and its readers with dominant narratives of the modern nation. narratives which in western traditions align masculinity, potency, modernity, and power onto one axis; in the process, it reveals the historical and psychic wounds those narratives try to mend.

Rushdie has been linked for the hybridity of East and West that results from such a strategy. Timothy Brennan argues that Rushdie's poly-semantics and mixed imagery denote a choice of cosmopolitanism over political action:

> Propelled and defined by media and market, cosmopolitanism today involves not so much an elite at *home,* as is does spokespersons for a kind or perennial immigration, valorized by a rhetoric of wandering, and rife with allusions to the all-seeing eye of nomadic sensibility. (2)

This sensibility, Brennan adds, denies "the old pattern of need to create a national *mythos* in the country of origin" (4) and, he implies, to assume the political responsibility that would accompany it. Michael Gorra points out that "to be cosmopolitan is, on this reading, to be inauthentic," and he notes that "Rushdie's work as a whole can perhaps best be seen as an attempt to contest the terms on which such judgments get nude" (131).

While politically void in and of itself, hybridity is what remains after narratives of clear genealogies and authentic speech have unraveled. In Rushdie's hands it is laden with self-conscious implications about on-going, colonial relationships. arid nowhere is this clearer than in *The Moor's Last Sigh.* In order to read the national allegory as a subversive strategy dedicated to wresting a new image of the nation out of older forms, rather than a mere example of his own mixed cultural allegiances, we must account for the historical specificity of both the narrator-subject's sense of lack and the nation-as-family metaphor that he seeks as compensation. In cinematic and psychoanalytic theories, the relationship of discourse to the subject who is constituted yet never completed by it emerges through the concept of suture. When suture binds psychic rather than physical wounds, according to Jacques-Alain Miller, it "names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse." Just as the medical suture compensates for torn tissue, psychoanalytic suture "figures there as the element which is lacking in the form of a stand-in." Miller's analysis of suture, drawn from Lacan's model of subjectivity. emphasizes the underlying nature of the wound, the way suture dairies lack. Suture describes, in other words, "the general relation or lack to the structure of which it is an element" (25-26). As suture becomes cinematic (or literary), it bridges the will between viewer/reader and subject through the process of identification. My focus here is on how that process offers the reader the pleasure and fulfillment of narrative compensation for historical lack.

Condensing earlier theoretical work cm 5uture, Kaja Silverman defines it in *The Subject of Semiotics* as "the name given to the procedures by moans of which cinematic texts confer subjectivity upon their viewers" (193). Often, though not solely, enacted by the shot/reverse shot formation, where the "second shot shows the field from which the first shot is assumed to have been taken,' suture aligns the viewer's or reader's gaze with that of the speaking subject or the text in order to mask the role of the photographer or author in structuring the shot. This formation fosters the "illusion that what is shown has an autonomous existence, independent of any technological interference, or any coercive gaze" (201): "[i]n other words. the subject of speech passes itself off as the speaking subject" (204). In fiction, suture transforms the narrator from the author's creation to a supposedly autonomous subject speaking his own words. Through the blink of an eye, suture establishes this fictional subject as the removed site of plenitude, unity, and power, creating in the reader a desire to see more by adhering to the gaze. The Other of the text (the narrator), according to Silverman, has "all the attributes of the mythically potent symbolic father: potency, knowledge, transcendental vision, self-sufficiency. and discursive power" (204).

Carrying this immense burden in the novel is the Moor, born in 1957 a descendant of Vasco de Gama, the early Jews of Cochin, the last Moorish sultan, and possibly even Prime Minister Nehru (the Moor's mother and Nehru are rumored to have been lovers). As the only son of this illustrious or infamous family, whose wealth stems from the spice trade, the Moor is expected to fulfill familial, social, and aesthetic goals: to extend the family name and wealth into the next generation, to embody Indian pluralism in his own right and in his mother's paintings (he models for her), and to capture the reader's imagination. Obstructing these goals, however, are the taint of his on possible illegitimacy, his disinheritance, his impotence and disfigurement, and his inability to find a singular truth behind each peeled-back layer of the familial and national palimpsest.

The text depends on the patriarchal family to reproduce Western modernity's hegemonic terms (conflating progress, paternity, and power) and on the image of Mother India for unifying social plurality; at the same time, it underscores the impossibility of either image producing a stable subject or nation. Through the alignment of subject and nation, Rushdie reveals the traumas underlying postcolonial Indian identities: the lasting influence of British culture, the inaccessibility of a purely "Indian" past, and the problem of defining modernity without acquiescing to the narrative of capital expansion. The theme of patriarchal power addresses these traumas with the rhetoric of familial and national purity. It finds its expression in the novel in the undeclared war between the Hindu fundamentalism of the Moor's employer and the corrupt capitalism of his father. The competition underscores the dangers of those yearnings for stable meaning by portraying them as authoritarian, intolerant, and corrupt. The maternal image, by contrast, works horizontally to bind disparate beliefs and cultures into, a singular national tableau. This strategy too fails, as its promise is undone by competition for the contemporary role of Mother India between Indira Gandhi; the Moor's mother, Aurora; and his girlfriend, Uma. Aurora's artistic vision charts historical change and offers the most inclusive view of modern India, yet it cannot help but document the decline of India's idealistic pluralism. Her painting career begins with . huge fantastical mural of historical, religious, and cultural imagery and "progresses" to paintings of fractured worlds to diptychs and triptychs to it final sinister palimpsest.

The Moor, as son, artist's model, and narrator, mediates between these images of the nation and the reader. He is successful to the extent that he can define himself as national spokesman in order to naturalize the nation as family metaphor. Challenges to that metaphor appear simultaneously as challenges to the narrator's authority and, thus, to our own investment in a reliable narrator such that we work with him to preserve the illusion of narrative authority When we cooperate with the narrator in this role, we participate in Rushdie's suturing, a strategy that seems particularly appropriate for an author who overtly honors the Bombay film industry with cinematic images, language, and processes of identification.

By continually asserting and subverting the narrator's power. Rushdie employs two literary suturing techniques defined by Brian Finney: point-of-view narration and metafiction. In point-of-view narration, the protagonist gives us an unfettered view of events, thereby masking the presence of the author: "we oscillate between anxiety at the threatened intrusion of the narrator's voice and pleasure *(jouissance)* once we have sutured over this intrusion by occupying a similar locus to that of the protagonist" (138). While the idea that point-of-view narration could succeed in fully masking the author's presence makes more sense theoretically than practically, the Moor constitutes an egregious example of this perspective in order to call its effects into question. Point-of-view narration in the novel promotes identification between narrator anti reader in the patriarchal terms Silverman outlines. For example, just as *Midnight's Children* asks us to identify with Saleem against Padma's demand for a linear story. *The Moor* asks us to identify with the narrator at the expense of Aio Ue, the Japanese painting restorer who shares the Moor's captivity and hears his tale, "dragged [him] down to earth" (421). In both novels, when Rushdie contrasts the desire of a female audience for simple linearity with the narrator's own convoluted and metaphorical story, Rushdie asks us to mark our own literary sophistication at the expense of that fictional feminine audience.

The second narrative technique, metafiction, works in opposition to point-of-view narration to align the reader With the author at the expense of the fictional subject. Rushdie does this through his diverse literary allusions and by regularly addressing the reader in a voice that does not quite match that of the ostensible narrator. At times, the novel addresses the reader directly in anticipation of questions he or she is probably asking:"Control, please, your horses," the metanarrator insists, to ward of our impatience (70). In another example, Rushdie writes: "And so for the yarn of the Moor: if I were forced to choose between logic and childhood memory, between head and heart, then sure; in spite of all the foregoing, I'd go along with the tale" (85-86).The passage reads contextually as the Moor's musing on what to believe about his past, though it may also read as an authorial reminder to the reader of his or her own choice to "go along with the tale." Rather than offering the reader the pleasure or identification with the protagonist, metafiction, in Finney's words, "constitutes its readers as intellectual problem solvers," as "participants in" rather than "consumers of" the text (140); the resulting pleasure masks its origins in the metatextual strategy itself.

Point-of-view narration and metafiction compete for the reader's loyalty. As *we* shift from the narrator to the author's perspective(s) and back again, we are reminded again and again of how our yearning for a stable image remains unfulfilled. The tension between perspectives reproduces our desire for allegorical purity and narrative cohesion on more than one level. We look for the Moor to show us what India looks like in the familial terms both we and he understand, and we turn to Rushdie for an invitation to help solve the problem of Indian identity as posed b the characters. While the competition between the Moor and Rushdie's stories may appear analogous to that between singular and pluralist narratives of national identity, both the Moor and his author are ultimately in search of a new, more pragmatic pluralism. At the same time, they remain tied to the gendered conceptions of the nation described above, even as. they render those conceptions suspect. We as readers must still rely on the division between material and spiritual, masculine and feminine national identities, in order to align our perspectives with that ache should-he empowered and modern "author." The conflicting paths of identification disrupt any pat formulas; the two kinds of suture continually draw attention to the very wounds, both historical and metaphorical, that they seek to bind.

Revisiting the wound reminds the reader of the historical crises in the nation's history, moments when the nation as family failed to hold its members together: its colonial past, interreligious strife, Indira Gandhi's Emergency, the rise of the neocolonial elite, the secessionist wars, and, finally, current sectarianism. In moving from point-of-view narration to metafiction we may recognize the spatial (geographic, cultural, or historical) difference between our own corporeal coordinates and those of the subject of the text, and recognize also the temporal disjunctures implicit in these shifting identifications. Such disjunctions become particularly acute when Rushdie's own political predicament rises to the surface, as when the Moor wonders:

> had I slipped accidentally from one page, one book of life on to another—in my wretched, disoriented state, had my reading finger perhaps slipped from the sentence of my own story on to this other, outlandish, incomprehensible text that had been lying, by chance, just underneath? (136)

Here the distinctions between narrator, author, and reader collapse, leaving unanswered questions of responsibility for a narrative that seems to b occurring "accidentally" or "by chance:˙ Can the Moor avoid responsibility for the Family history he tells? Does Rushdie bear any responsibility for the upheavals in his own life? Can the reader remain a distant observer of rather than participant in the metaphors that explain the nation? Although identification may he unconscious, we may become aware of its processes. Threats to the Moor's family standing, such as his suspect parentage and disinheritance, undercut his narrative and national authority. Despite the supposed parallels between his roles as artistic subject, national subject, and narrative subject, questions of authorship—of whom or what to trust—inevitably arise. Looking at himself in Aurora's paintings of the "golden age" of Indian pluralism, he finds himself "happy to be there, because the story unfolding on her canvases seemed more like my autobiography than the real story of my life" (227).Without the easy comfort of a singular history or pure lineage to impose order on historical trauma, we founder, like the Moor, among the narratives claiming our allegiance.

The Moor's Last Sigh investigates impurity in all its forms: it details how low of country and, thus, the nation-as-family metaphor become eroticized, breaking the fundamental (in Freudian terms) incest taboo and resulting in a seemingly endless array of sexual, economic, political, and religious corruptions. But despite these revelations, the novel is a paean to the power of the aesthetic. With the image of the palimpsest, which runs throughout the novel to characterize Bombay, markets, paintings, politics, characters, and the story itself, Rushdie suggests that aesthetic texts can reveal what usually remains hidden, that within their impurities lie other truths.

The Moor is our guide through a series of false Edens in which the "romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation" (227) gives way to "debauchery and crime" (303). He defines himself as a "jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was—what's the word these days?—*atomized.* Yessir: a real Bombay mix" (104). Born a decade after independence, he represents the city itself, his on fantastical growth (he ages at twice the average speed) a mirror or urban sprawl:

> I grew in all directions, willy-nilly. My father was a big man but by the age of ten my shoulders had grown wider than his coats. I was a skyscraper freed of all legal restraints, a one-man population explosion, a megalopolis, a shirt-ripping, button-popping Hulk. (188)

In addition to his accelerated development, the Moor is distinguished by his deformed right hand. This deformity symbolizes and substitutes for the phallic power the narrator wants yet can never wholly achieve, particularly after he becomes sexually impotent. As Silverman notes in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins,* ideological consistency depends on the alignment of phallic power with the male sexual organ. In making that metaphorical connection literal in the novel, Rushdie renders it available for conscious scrutiny. The Moor is unable to assume his legacy as the only son of Aurora and Abraham, raising the question of the kinds of narrative authority he has or lacks.

Once again the image of Mother India determines the contemporary terms of that legacy. The Moor, who unwittingly insults his mother and trades an eroticized relationship with her for a doomed 'affair with multipersonality Uma, is disinherited for his disloyalty and -cast into the underworld from the Eden of his mother's artistic salon. The cost of losing his mother's love, or of forsaking it, is his familiar identity. Finding himself in the hidden bowels of the central jail, beneath the city he thought he knew in its entirety, he imagines

> that my skin was indeed coming away from my body, as I had dreamed so long ago that it would. But in this version of the dream, my peeling skin took with it all the elements of my personality. I was becoming nobody, nothing; or, rather, I was becoming what had been made of me. I was what the Warder saw, what my nose smelled on my body, what the rats were beginning, with growing enthusiasm, to approach. I was scum. (288)

Without the protective and unifying image of Aurora, the Moor finds himself at the disposal of competing ideological factions led by his father and the Hindu nationalist, Raman Fielding.

This tension, between the eroticization of the nation as family and the need for the metaphor in maintaining a sense or sell, is replayed throughout the novel. What varies is the image of Mother India herself: the urban, aristocratic painter, Aurora; prime minister and self-appointed national matriarch. Indira Gandhi: and the long-suffering, poor, Hindu mother the film *Mother India*. In one scene, Aurora, whose paintings present her son against an expressionistic national backdrop, presides over one of her famous soirees. In the novel as a whole she represents an irreverent and urban alternative to Indira Gandhi's "Indira is India" and the hit film Mother *India's* feminine symbolics (which rely on images of Hindu mythology and rural spirit). At the party, Aurora addresses the leading lady of *Mother India,* who plays Radha, and the actress's husband Sunil, who plays the wayward son Birju:

> The first time I saw that picture, I took one look at your Bad Son, Birju, and I thought, O boy, what a handsome guy—too much sizzle, too much chilli, bring water. He may be a thief and a bounder, but that is some A-class loverboy goods. And now look—you have gone and marry-o'ed him! What sexy lives you movie people leadofy: to marry your own son, I swear, wowie. (137)

Despite the guests' shocked protestations regarding the difference between " fictions" and "flesh and blood," Aurora insists on conflating them. Another painter Auroras devotee and, later, the Moor's captor—Vasco Miranda, encourages the conflation at the guests expense: "Sublimation, of mutual parent-child longing, is deep-rooted in the national psyche […] *Mother India is* die dark side of the Radha-Krishna story, with the subsidiary theme of forbidden love added on. But what the hell; Oedipus-schmoedipus!" (138). Rushdie intertwines the actual film (arguably the most widely recognized national cultural icon) and its actors with his invented plot (that, in the case of Aurora and the Moor$_e$ suggests the film version) in order to make literal the metaphors of national identity and to make us ask if any of these incarnations of Mother India has a greater claim on "reality" than the others.

This strategy forces readers to reconsider readings of the film itself, its importance as an image of national identity, and the wider validity of the nation-as-family image as embodied by the maternal figure. The film, actually made in 1957, the year of the Moor's birth, achieves its success through the displacement of minority identities in Favor of Hindu nationalism. Radha *is* Mother India because of her dedication in working the land and loving her child despite immense personal suffering. The equates her honor with the land itself, and Radha defends both against all potential defilers and doubters, eventually inspiring her village with her devotion to the land even after the monsoon and her willingness to sacrifice everything, including her own son, for honor. According to Nalini Natarajan, the lead actress's Muslim identity is co-opted and forgotten in her marriage co her Hindu costar and in the film's Hindu

> cultural message […] with its echoes of Radha, Parvati, Sita with all of the traditional self-sacrificing virtues ascribed to these women. We have, then, a nationalist articulation of Hindu religion and culture focusing on the figure of a Muslim actress. (85)

In Rushdie's hands, the film's image of Mother India is complicit with rather than opposed to the dominant Western model of the nation as family. While Mother India might seem to provide the basis for alternative national identifications based on the split between feminized tradition and masculinized modernity, as suggested by Radhakrishnan, in fact the image works to promote both majoritarian politics and the normative identifications of the Oedipal complex.

In the novel, Rushdie invokes and subverts the Familiarity of the image of Mother India by revealing the layers of conflicting meanings it contains. On one level of the plot he contrasts Indira Gandhi's authoritarianism with the vision of pluralism in Aurora's paintings, noting that these two perspectives are mutually exclusive ideologically and that public favor wavers from one to the other. Through the incompatibility of Aurora's and Indira's visions of the nation (Aurora's paintings are panned by the public when Indira's authority heightens), Rushdie shows how aesthetic value remains tied to political context. Further confusing the imagery of the age, the public rejects Aurora's exhibit, it embraces Uma's abstract sculptures on the themes of religion and motherhood. The dichotomy between the domestic, benevolent Parvati and the violent, all-consuming Kali—female goddesses competing to represent the nation—surfaces in the fortunes of Uma and the prime minister. Despite her artistic success and ability to insinuate herself into positions of power, however, Uma fails to maintain a stable alternative identity, even as Parvati. Her aesthetic depiction of religion and motherhood is just one of many veneers she presents to get what she wants. Those veneers mask a dangerous and hollow core dedicated, much like Kali herself, to consumption and destruction in an insatiable bid for control. It is only after she has contrived to destroy the Moor's relationship with his family and finally kills herself that the Moor sees her as a warning against facile multiplicity:

> what had happened was, in a way, a defeat for the pluralist philosophy on which we had all been raised. For in the matter of Uma Sarasvati it had been the pluralist Uma, with her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth, who had turned out to be the bad egg. (272)

> When difference is reduced to equivalence, or multiculturalism becomes a matter of style and not belief, Rushdie warns, it loses its historical and political foundations. Uma easily exchanges one identity for another, depending on political expediency, thereby emptying them all of real significance.

Despite her political irrelevance during Indira Gandhi's rule, Aurora remains through her lifetime the most important alternative to the rural matriarch of the film and to Gandhi's own maternal image. Whereas *Mother India* realizes "the Indian peasant woman […] as bride, mother, and producer of sons; as long-suffering, stoical, loving, redemptive, and conservatively wedded to the maintenance of the status quo," Aurora, the Moor says, "was a city girl, perhaps *the* city girl, as much the incarnation of the smartyboots metropolis as Mother India was village earth made flesh" (139). The ironic comparison is between the cosmopolitan Bombay film industry and its most popular product. Wealthy, headstrong, and visionary, Aurora refuses to bend her

artistic and personal attitudes to prevailing tastes. Although she flouts tradition as a matter of course--from her marriage to the Jewish duty manager in her father's vast export company to her artistic flamboyance to her many lovers, she remains committed to the ideal image, promulgated by Nehru, of a secular India dedicated to protecting its diverse community interests, That same commitment to political communion distinguishes Aurora's aesthetic of pluralism from Uma's.

As a member of an (elite) economic, religious, and ethnic minority, Aurora tries to incorporate her Family history into a national aesthetic vision. Uma and Adam, two representatives of the next generation of Indians, define themselves through a seemingly ahistorical internationalization of languages and images rather than their plural or hybrid forms. Lima's familial and cultural contexts are wholly fabricated, and Adam's are elided (his quasi-mythic parentage by Shiva and Parvati and his rearing by Salem and the pickle factory women remain the concerns of *Midnight's Children).*

In contrast, Aurora's paintings reflect the changing fortunes of her family and the nation, within and against images of Mother India. Her career begins with the mural she paints across her room after her mother's death dispels the idyllic trance of childhood. The mural incorporates stories of her childhood without their sanitizing loss: Vasco de Gama, her ancestor, arriving in India, smelling spices and money; the Last Supper with her family members attending their feasting servants; the masons of the Taj Mahal losing their hands to prevent the construction of anything finer; the approaching war for independence; erotic temple imagery through a child's eye; and her own fanciful gods. Like the crowd that swallows Saleem at the end of *Midnight's Children,* and Rushdie in his film *The Riddle of Midnight,* the mural draws Aurora's lather "onward" into "the crowd without boundaries." At the center of the mural and the height of the ceiling was the face of Aurora's mother, Belle. It was Mother India in all her manifestations—"Mother India with her garishness and her inexhaustible motion, Mother India who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave" (61). Personal and national longing unite in recognition of the lack that can never be made good, the melancholia that can never be cured; Aurora's overabundant, imaginative depictions of histories and identities offer the only possible compensation.

Aurora's aesthetic aims are communal rather than comprehensive: the paintings explore the problem of imagining the nation rather than present a singular, definitive perspective of it. After independence, for example, Aurora finds herself in a creative conundrum, caught between

Vasco Miranda's playful influence, his fondness for imaginary worlds whose only natural law was his own sovereign whimsicality, and Abraham's dogmatic insistence on the importance, at that historical juncture, of a clear-sighted naturalism that would help India describe herself to herself. (173)

Faced with this dilemma, Aurora, like Rushdie, instead uses layers, diptychs, and triptychs to emphasize the multifaceted dimensions of the real and the need to look beyond the surface.

Aurora's subsequent artistic periods loosely mark the Moor's development and the political fortunes of Indira Gandhi and her family. The paintings of her early period (1957-77, from the Moor's birth to the ousting of Gandhi after the Emergency), high period (1977-81, from Gandhi's ousting until she regained power), and dark period (1981-87, from the Moor's disinheritance through the assassinations of Indira and marking the end of the Gandhi "dynasty") all focus on the Moor. He functions not only as a representative of the nation and as a window into his own family's affairs but also, in his depiction as Sultan Boabdil (the last sultan of Granada), from whom he is descended on his father's side, as a symbol of the nation's long, complicated history.

In the early period, as if to record the hopefulness of India and her only son, Aurora paints criticized portraits of herself and the Moor in which his deformed hand, otherwise a sign of colonialism's disfigurement of the national body, "was transformed into a series of miracles" (224). As torches of light and symbols of power and fertility, these depictions of the Moor's hand make vestiges of the colonial past into a new source of strength. That strength lasts as long as he remains loyal to his mother as his one love. In these paintings, his deformity,

which marks him, as does his heritage, as marginal and possibly even cursed (the family name, Zogoiby, translates as "unlucky"), transforms the world around him into his kingdom. Aurora's masterpieces of the period portray their affluent Malabar Hill home as the Moor's fantastical palace, a cousin to the Red Fort in Delhi and the Alhambra in Granada. The fantastical worlds of Palimpstine and Mooristan that Aurora creates encapsulate the romantic myth of Indian pluralism, and throughout her life she urges her son to search for them. Even after the Emergency forever ends that period of hopefulness, and her paintings turn from palimpsests to apocalyptic images of division, she gives him a passport with a Spanish visa and as one-way ticket: "Always keep it valid […] Only don't go to the English. We have had enough of them. Go find Palimpstine; go see Mooristan" (235).

Aurora invokes the symbol of Mughal power, Delhi's Red Fort, to represent what Nehru called in his independence address "the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell" (95). Rushdie himself creates a historical palimpsest, layering, as it were architectural references to India's political history stretching from the Moorish invasion to the Mughal Empire to British colonialism to the current central government. He circulates the image of the Red Fort in an attempt to accomplish aesthetically what Nehru tried politically: to forge symbols of a united India that simultaneously reflect its complicated past. Aware of the need for symbolic identification to compensate for the lack of historical unity, Nehru inaugurated the state ritual of raising the national flag from the fort on each anniversary of independence. The image of the Red Fort thus mixes memory and forgetting, making identification with the unified nation a matter of suspended disbelief.

When the Moor transfers his devotion from his mother to Uma (coinciding with the Emergency), Aurora's paintings turn dark and threatening. In place of multiple worlds lading in and out alone another, she paints jagged fissures swallowing up her fantastical creatures and shows the fort crumbling into rubble. Gradually her style becomes more naturalistic as she shows herself watching the Moor watching Uma. It reveals Aurora's self-conscious awareness of her ebbing power to hold his love and allegiance.

Alter Lima engineers the Moor's expulsion from his family, Aurora's aesthetic eye trails him into the underworld where she views his decline with increasing horror. He later sees himself in these last paintings as

> [m]otherless […] his previous metaphorical role as a unifier of opposites, a standard-hearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol—however approximate--or the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay. (302)

To survive in the underworld beneath cosmopolitan Bombay, he learns to use his deformed hand as a club, enforcing the will of Raman Fielding, Here we find what Norman Rush calls “a mordant reflection on the final outlook for religious nationalism in India, whose most cheering conclusion is that any hope for the downfall of that institution lies in the infinite mercenary corruptibility of the human species.” The only escape from the underworld is, paradoxically, up through its ranks of corruption. At the top the Moor finds his father, Abraham, presiding over a corporate empire that stretches from land development to drug smuggling to weapons production.

Rushdie presents religious nationalism and economic corruption as the tides that fill the void left by the failure of modern plurality (Aurora's vision) and Bombay's cosmopolitanism. The Moor's downfall mirrors the changing fortunes of the city itself: his underworld experiences have their political analog in the rise of Bombay's Shiv Sena (Army of Shivaji) party. In the vacuum kit by the organizational collapse of the Congress Party—begun by Indira Gandhi's restructuring of the central party's regional alliances after Nehru's death in 1964, and by the increasing disparity in Bombay' between the political power of the rich and the poor—the Shiv Sena movement provides a source of community identification and political will.

Khilnani charts Shiv Sena's rise from the 1960s to the present as the triumph of religious sectarianism over pluralism. What began As an "anti-immigrant party, dedicated to protecting employment and educational opportunities for Bombay's Marathi-speakers" has, with a keen sense of political opportunity, increased its power by targeting Tamils, other English-speaking migrants, and, most recently, Muslims (142). It has

increased its political might by providing basic services to its constituents and, in the 1980s, by fostering sectarianism through violent riots against Muslims and their property. The alliance the Shiv Sena forged with the BJP in 1984 provides a further example of the way in which, at least for Rushdie, the transformation of Bombay into Mumbai reflects the wider political climate of the nation. Khilnani suggests a similar conclusion, as he cites Rushdie's vision of Indian plurality in his analysis of Shiv Sena:

> "In Bombay all Indias met and merged. In Bom.bay, too, all-India met what-was-not India ... what was beautiful in Bombay was that it belonged to nobody and to all"—that of nationalist dream of Bombay, and the sense of its end, suffuses Salman Rushdie's lament for the city […] The Shiv Sena visualizes India not as a land of cosmopolitan miscegenation, but as a hierarchical grid that contains internally homogenous communities, each insulated from the others. This idea seeks to efface Bombay's cosmopolitanism, to annex its modernity and distribute its benefits to one closed community. (143-44)

Just as Rushdie represents the differences between Nehru and Indira Gandhi's national visions through Aurora And Lima, he shows the more recent conflict between international and national identifications through Aurora's and Vasco Miranda's paintings. Aurora's final painting, which the Moor sees only after his death and whose title he appropriates for his own story, shows mother and son reunited in one panel but not reconciled. While she holds out her hand in forgiveness, a sign of India's in capacity for inclusion, he is in the foreground, "lost in limbo like a wandering shade" (315). *The Moor's Last Sigh* is also the title of Miranda's homage to Aurora's palimpsests. Initially commissioned by Abraham in 1947 to do a portrait of Aurora and their first child, Miranda painted a bare-breasted Aurora cradling air, Abraham, incensed by the apparent insult, rejects the portrait and sends Miranda back to the studio, where he paints a self-portrait as the last sultan—*The Artist as Boadbil, the Unlucky (el-Zogoiby), Last Sultan of Granada, Seen Departing from the Alhambra. Or The Moor's Last Sigh*—over the rejected Madonna tableau. The self-portrait quickly confirms his commercial potential, launching his career as an internationally renowned muralist for airports and corporate headquarters. In the aesthetic comparisons Rushdie makes between Aurora, Lima, and Miranda, he represents the challenge to pluralism both by rising communitarianism and by globalization of culture and capital. Both drain an aesthetic of difference of its historical and cultural substance.

The multiple referents of the title converge at the end of the novel when, seeking to escape the collapse of his family empire and the city he loves, the Moor travels to Spain, hoping to find Aurora's four stolen paintings in Miranda's "Little Alhambra." He finds Miranda ensconced in what at first appears to be a fantastical tribute to Aurora's imagination but is gradually revealed to be "no New Moorusalem, but an ugly, pretentious house" (409). This realization comes too late to save the Moor from imprisonment in a garish tower with a Japanese painting restorer, Aoi Ue. While she must work each day to uncover the madonna image beneath Miranda's self-portrait, the Moor is forced to record his family history as his own "last sigh." The Moor's pilgrimage ends in failure because he finds "an anti-jerusalem: not at home, but an away. A place that did not bind, but dissolved" (388). The Moor initially believes that only Aurora's aesthetic vision, with its melding or history, myth, and imagination, can mend his physical and psychological wounds. Ultimately the narrative, in its imitation or Aurora's palimpsest, must provide its own and the Moor's satisfaction. After Aurora's death and Miranda's destruction of her work and his portrait of her (he fires a shot through it), only the Moor’s text recreates her images.

Thy alternatives to secular pluralism that Rushdie associates with the maternal image are presented as false Edens. In addition to the religious singularism that he rejects for obvious reasons, he presents unscrupulous and unrestrained capitalism as yet another national affliction. Adam and Abraham epitomize this most recent corruption. Last seen as an infant in *Midnight’s Children*, Adam reappears here as representative of the global market. At only 17, he has amassed a private fortune with his business savvy, founded, like Uma's success, on his linguistic flexibility. As the Moor says,

> [t]here was a generation waiting to inherit the earth, caring nothing for old-timers' concerns: dedicated to the pursuit of the new, speaking the future's strange, binary, affectless speech—quite a change from our melodramatic garam-masala exclamations. (343)

> Abraham recognizes how that speech can work hand in hand with his own ability to lose his "humble origins" in becoming a corporate legend, with his shady economic interests and a compliant political climate. When the government declares, for instance, that city dwellers not listed on the recent census (the homeless) do not exist, Abraham sees opportunity,

> hiring as many phantoms as they could to work on the huge construction sites springing up on every inch of the new land, and even going so far— O philanthropists!—as to pay them small amounts of cash for their work. "Nobody ever heard of paying spooks until we began the practice," said ancient Abraham, cackling wheezily. "But naturally we accepted tm responsibility in case of ill-health or injury. It would have been, if you follow my line, illogical." (187)

Only after the corrupt foundations of his wealth begin to emerge does Abraham Feel regret at the loss of one more Eden: "The magic stops working when people start seeing the strings," he tells the Moor. "To hell! I had a damn fine run. Have a bloody apple" (187).

Adam and Abraham represent the threat that corporate colonialism poses to national identity. As opposed to religious nationalism, we find economic post nationalism. In Khilnani's analysis of India's cities, Bangalore represents an urban counterpart to Adam and Abraham. Populated by a relatively new entrepreneurial, industrial, and technical professional class, Bangalore is home to many of the largest multinationals operating in India. While India provides highly trained, relatively inexpensive labor for corporations such as IBM and Hewlett-Packard, they in turn oiler workers salaries unmatchable in other parts of the country or sectors of the economy. These corporations wield an economic power that both carries with it and produces international identifications, such that, Khilnani writes, the city "has become the capital of Non-Resident India -… and] this new class too has a secessionist understanding of the idea of India" (148).

The image of economic, political, and aesthetic false Edens whose idyllic veils are eventually stripped away puts the blame for corruption on Indians themselves rather than on outside forces. Those "sequestered, serpented, Edenic-infernal private universes" (15) that enclose the Moor's Family history are sites of privilege and opportunity squandered by greed and corruption. As both elite minority and national spokesman, the Moor insists that there are no pure lineages and that all bear responsibility for the nation’s fate. His Moorish lineage does not absolve the majority from politico responsibility; instead it draws attention to the spread of neocolonialism in business and politics. The Moor with whom he is continually compared, Boadbil, last sultan of Granada, effectively ended his empire by betraying his father and then capitulating to the Spanish. Rushdie clearly plays on the ironies of colonialism intersecting in the sultan's story. Boadbil is the last trace of Arab power in Europe, power that once competed with Vasco de Gana for trade routes to Asia and stretched from the Iberian Peninsula to the Sultanate of Delhi, and his decline made way for the expansion of Spanish and Portuguese global reach. These two imperial narratives intersect in Christopher Columbus, who, in Spain to Seek Isabella's patronage for his intended voyage to India, attends the ceremony marking Boadbil's abdication to Catholic rule over Granada in 1491, thus marking the beginning of a whole other colonial narrative.[2]

The Moor bears the weight of colonial history, yet insists upon taking responsibility for national affairs rather than attributing them to the legacies of the past. As he departs Bombay with his stuffed dog Jawaharlal (a sad commentary on the prime minister's legacy), for example, ruminates on Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Education," with its encapsulation of British colonial mentality, concluding:

a class of Macaulay's Minutemen [Indians educated by the British to facilitate colonization] would hate the best of India […] We [the Moor's family] were not, had never been, that class. The best, and worst, were in us, and

fought in us, as they fought in the land at large. In some of us, the worst triumphed; but we could still say—and say truthfully—that we had loved the best. (376)

The love that perseveres at the end of the novel is for Aurora's hybrid Mother India. Just as Aoi Ue painstakingly unveils Aurora from beneath the Sultan's image, the Moor tries to reconstruct her in his narrative. Yet Aurora has already died, the painting will be destroyed before it is restored, and just as in Aurora's childhood mural, the emphasis is on a central lack and therefore, on the aesthetic processes that attempt to suture it. Once Aoi Ue is murdered, only the text of *The Moor's* Last *Sigh* retains hope in the aesthetic's capacity for imaginative renewal and vision, powers that depend on an acknowledgment of the lack they try to overcome.

Acknowledgment of lack (historical and metaphorical) is the prerequisite for reimagining the nation, as such acknowledgment shills the process of identification—and thus of idealization—from what is familiar to what is "other."The aesthetic plays a privileged role in this process in its ability to highlight the distance between reader and text necessary for revision of the nation. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* this highlighting involves the shifting narrative perspectives and the trope of the palimpsest that always hints at another vision lying just below the surface. Rushdie constructs the living presence of India's hybrid history out of word plays, parodies, and images, a history that refuses to conform to a nostalgic vision of a unified past. As aesthetic value may depend on pleasure and desire, when a text stimulates these, it potentially expands our libidinal range. Rushdie does this through the nation-as-family metaphor. Whose familiarity invites our identification with it. Although that metaphor attempts to domesticate difference in order to create a singular national identity, by showing the processes of domestication at work, both its successes and failures, he calls attention to its availability to multiple identifications. In becoming conscious of that multiplicity, we may learn to idealize what is outside of ourselves. The aesthetic intervenes in the normative proms of identification by simultaneously allowing for conscious scrutiny of its terms and for unconscious stimulation, necessary for idealization.

Silverman describes the process of "ex-corporative" identification in terms of sublimation. Following Lacan, she defines sublimation as the "shift away from the impossible non-object of desire that is produced with entry into language and the 'fading' of the real to a nameable and specific object." That new object becomes laden with the responsibility of "making good the subject's Jack." Narrative or aesthetic compensation, then, offers the subject images with which to assuage his or her foundational desires: "When one treats an object this way, one of course idealizes it. To sublimate is thus to confer ideality on that someone or something through which tin subject articulates his or her ineffable desire" (Threshold 75).

We see this process at work in the novel through the transformation of the character Nadia Wadia.[3] She is at first the reigning Miss India and Miss World, who "after her victory became an emblem of the nation" (314). Betrothed to the Moor, she is adored by Fielding, who wants her to validate his Hindu nationalist politics, and by his bodyguard, who merely falls in love. As beauty queen and national spokeswoman, Nadia's fortunes rise on Aurora's death, such that Nadia clearly represents a pan-Indian aesthetic; yet she is described, like the famous actress after whom she is named, as "tall, Valkyrean Nadia" (311). The original Nadia Wadia was the English and Greek Mary Evans, who married producer Homi Wadia, changed her first name. and performed AS the stunt queen "Fearless Nadia" in the early days of Bollywood (1930s and 405). The films shared a common theme: the princess-turned-stunt-woman must conquer evil power in the kingdom and set free good subjects and rulers. Sumita S. Chakravarty writes: "To a people still under colonial rule, such fantasies of power anti action must have provided intense psychological satisfaction, particularly since the stunts were performed by a woman" (60). By revising an early female image of national independence, Rushdie insists on a radically open definition of "Indian."

The Nadia Walla of the novel, representing the nation, has the last word in India before the story shifts to the Moor's final decline in Spain. On the day of the city's explosion (after the Moor has already kit the country), the lovestruck bodyguard slashes her face, unable to hear the unattainable status of his ideal. Soon after, she reappears in the public eye "when the scars across her face were still livid, the permanence of the disfigurement

all too evident" (376) But rather than become a symbol of the failure of what could have been, she insists on representing the hope of the future. As she says to her television viewers:

> So I asked myself, Nadia Wadia, is it the end for you? Is it curtains? And for some time I thought, achha, yes, it's all over, khalaas. But then I was asking myself what are you talking, men? At twenty-three to say that whole of life is funtoosh? What pagalpan, what nonsense, Nadia Wadia! Girl, get a grip, OK? The city will survive. New towers will rise. Better days will come. Now I am saying it every day. Nadia Wadia, the future beckons. Hearken to its call. (376-77)

This final female Face of India is scary but still beautiful, and her language, unlike that Uma or Adam, reflects her local rather than global context. Her stitches, like the aesthetic sutures running through the book, ensure that violence girding, the nation will not be forgotten and that idealization can only take place through a conscious coming to terms with her altered image. Whereas the Moor's concluding wish is that he might "hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time" (434), Nadia forces her audience to lace the present. Both the nation-as-family metaphor and the high-art aesthetic—and the politics associated them—fail in this conclusion. In place of the nation-as-family metaphor, and in place of the world of high art in which aesthetics previously operated, he offers popular culture as the site of aesthetic and national renewal. That renewal must take place through the unveiling of memories and histories of the horrific alongside the beautiful. Such a conclusion may be read optimistically or parodically, as we are left to wonder if our imaginations are up to the task of reconstituting our worlds.

Notes

1. The patriarchal-family metaphor is so widespread (beyond just Indian fiction), McClintock writes, because it "offers a 'natural' figure for sanctioning national *hierarchy* within a putative organic *unity* of interests. [Also,] it offers a `natural' trope tor figuring national time" (91). She insists that we recognize the historical context of this metaphor's increasing presence in national narratives after the rise of social Darwinism.

2. Richard Fletcher, in his description of the transfer of power, notes that "curiously enough, [the Catholic monarchs] had chosen to dress themselves in Moorish costume for the ceremony" (165).This idiosyncratic appropriation of Moorish dress finds its way into *The Moor's Last Sigh* in Miranda's portrait and Aurora's thematic paintings.

In "Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain Consummate Their Relationship (Santa Fe. AD 1492)." Rushdie plays on the interstices of colonial narratives with an eroticized story of coloni2ing appetites, He represents a frustrated Columbus imagining the queen at the takeover:

> *See: there at the gates of Alhambra is Boadbil the Unlucky, the last Sulltan of the last redoubt of all the centuries of Arab Spain. Behold*: *now, at this very instant, he surrenders the keys to the citadel into her, grasp ... there! And as the weight of the keys falls from his hand into hers, she ... she . . .* yawns." (114)

The story sexualizes imperial desire so that Columbus and the queen need each other for their conquests, "The loss of money and patronage:" Columbus says, "is as bitter as unrequited love" (115). Resenting his dependence on the queen, he fantasizes about refusing her if she calls for him. When the summons finally arrives, however, he answers, *"Yes, I'll come"* (119).

3. Thanks to Vikram Chandra for introducing me to the history of the original Nadia Wadia.

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